

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 A-01 OPR-02 SY-05 OC-06 CCO-00

DHA-02 IO-13 EUR-12 OMB-01 /090 W

-----241724 030249 /44

O R 241530Z FEB 77

FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9515

INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

AMEMBASSY MASERU NIACT IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 0463

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, BC, RH

SUBJECT: GOB CLAIMS RHODESIAN ATTACK ON BOTSWANA "IMMINENT"

1. SUMMARY: GOB OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT ANNOUNCED AFTER-
NOON FEBRUARY 24 THAT RHODESIA ABOUT TO LAUNCH "MAJOR ATTACK"
ON BOTSWANA. EMBASSY RECEIVED AFEW FURTHER DETAILS FROM ADMIN
SECRETARY TO PRESIDENT. END SUMMARY.

2. TEXT OF PRESS RELEASE AS FOLLOWS:

QTE: THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT HAS RECEIVED RELIABLE
INFORMATION THAT MAJOR ATTACK ON BOTSWANA BY THE SMITH REIGME
IS IMMINENT. THIS IS NOT SURPRISING BECAUSE IT HAS BEEN
CLEAR FOR SOME TIME THAT THE REGIME IS INCREASINGLY BECOM-
ING DESPERATE AS THE LIBERATION WAR INTENSIFIES IN ZIMBABWE.
SMITH'S TERRORITS ARE NOW LOOKING FOR SCAPEGOATS AND BOTSWANA
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HAPPENS TO BE THE NEAREST TARGET.

QTE: THIS WILL BE YET ANOTHER UNPROVOKED ACT OF
AGRESSION BY THE REBEL REGIME AND IT WOULD BE TANTA-
MOUNT TO A DECLARATION OF WAR AGAINST BOTSWANA. BOTS-
WANA WILL THEREFORE HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO DEFEND
HERSELF IN WHATEVER WAY SHE DEEMS FIT.

QUOTE4 THE NATION IS ADVISED TO REMAIN CALM BUT VIGILANT IN THE FACE OF THIS IMMINENT THREAT. OUR COUNTRY IS NOW ENTERING THE MOST DIFFICULT PERIOD IN ITS HISTORY AND THE NATION SHOULD BE PREPARED TO MAKE EVEN GREATER SACRIFICES IF WE ARE TO SURVIVE AS A FREE AND INDEPENDENT PEOPLE. AND WE SHALL SURVIVE BECAUSE WE MUST. END QUOTE

3. AFTER ANNOUNCEMENT, EMBASSY ATTEMPTED TO OBTAIN ADDITIONAL DETAILS. USUALLY KNOWLEDGABLE SPECIAL BRANCH OFFICER ADMITTED THAT INFORMATION HAD NOT COME FROM SPECIAL BRANCH WHO HAD THEMSELVES BEEN OOLD BY OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT SHORTLY BEFORE BROADCAST. EMBOFF FOUND ADMIN SECRETARY TIBONE, EXTAFF SECRETARY MPOTOKWANE AND PRESIDENTIAL PRIVATE SECRETARY LEGWAILA GATHERED IN TIBONE'S OFFICE
AWAITING BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER WHO ALSO ATTEMPTING TO ASCERTAIN DETAILS. BIBONE BRIEFLY SAID THAT SOURCE OF INFORMATION WAS "RELIABLE" ONE WHO IN PAST HAD ACCURATELY TIPPED OFF GOB ABOUT SOME MINOR RHODESIAN INCURSIONS AND ATTACKS. TIBONE WAS UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO DESCRIBE SIZE OF IMPENDING ATTACK OR TARGET. HE DID CAHRACTERIZE IT AS "MOZAMBIQUE-STYLE" BUT DIRECTED AGAINST BOTSWANA ITSELF, NOT AGAINST GUERRILLAS OR REFUGEES. LEGWAILA ADDED THAT ATTACK COULD EVEN BE AGAINST GABORONE, BUTNDID NOT APPEAR TO TAKE HIS STATEMENT SERIOUSLY.

4. COMMENT: THE TONE OF THIS PRESS RELEASE MAY BE UNDULE
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HYSTERICAL, DUE TO THE FACT THAT SECRETARY TO THE CABINET STEENKAMP (WHO USUALLY DRAFT GOB PRESS RELEASES ON SECURITY MATTERS) IS TEMPORARILY OUT OF BOTSWANA. NONETHELESS, WE MUST APPRECIATE GO'S APPREHENSION, ESPECIALLY SINCE THE UNNAMED SOURCE OF THIS INFORMAION HAD ESTABLISHED ITS CREDIBILITY ON A NUMBER OF PRIOR OCCASIONS WHEN ITS INTELLIGENCE HAD PROVEN TO BE ACCURATE.

THE GOB MAY, IF THE ATTACK NEVER MATERILIZES, HAVE BEEN UNWISE TO ALARM THE POPULACE UNNECESSARILY. IN TAKING THIS RISK, THE GOB MAY, ASIDE FROM GIVING PRIOR WARNING TO THE PEOPLE, BE ATTEMPTING TO: (A) FORSTALL A REAL RHODESIAN THREAT BY GIVING IT FULL PUBLICITY; (B) DRAMATIZE BOTSWANA'S DEFENSE LESS SITUATION WHILE THE VISITING UN FARAH MISSION IS STILL IN COUNTRY; AND (C) CUT THE GROUND FROM UNDER FRANCISTOWN PHILLIP MATANTE AND OTHER RADICAL OPPOSITION ELEMENTS WHO WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY USE THE OCCASION OF SUCH AN ATTACK SERIOUSLY TO EMBARRASS THE GOB.

5. UK HIGH COMMISSION HAD NO ADVANCE KNOWLEDGE OF
PRESS RELEASE, AND IN FACT CALLED EMBASSY TO SEE IF WE
KNEW ANYTHING. AS NOTED ABOVE, EMBOFF SAW UK HIGH
COMMISSIONER ENTER OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENCY
AS HE WAS LEAVING. UNDERSTAND FROM UK HIGH COMMISSION
SHE PLANS TO COMPARE NOTES WITH US AFTER HERE
VISIT. WILL FOLLOW UP WITH ANOTHER MESSAGE IF WE
LEARN ANYTHING NEW OR STARTLING.

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Message Attributes

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Sent Date: 24-Feb-1977 12:00:00 am
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